

A Letter of
ABRAHAM LINCOLN
in reply to

*An Invitation to attend a Festival in Honor of
the Birthday of Thomas Jefferson*

Composed directly from the original letter, now in the *John Hay Memorial Library* at *Brown University*, and twenty-five copies printed in this form at the *Moorsfield Press, Champlain, N. Y.*, June 19, 1923

SPRINGFIELD, ILLS. April 6, 1859
Messrs. HENRY L. PIERCE, & others.

Gentlemen

Your kind note inviting me to attend a Festival in Boston, on the 13th Ins't in honor of the birth-day of Thomas Jefferson, was duly received— My engagements are such that I can not attend—

Bearing in mind that about seventy years ago, two great political parties were first formed in this country, that Thomas Jefferson was the head of one of them, and Boston the head-quarters of the other, it is both curious and interesting that those supposed to descend politically from the party opposed to Jefferson, should now be celebrating his birth-day in their own original seat of empire, while those claiming political descent from him have nearly ceased to breathe his name everywhere—

Remembering too, that the Jefferson party were formed upon their supposed superior devotion to the *personal* rights of [of] men, holding the rights of *property* to be secondary only, and greatly inferior, and then assuming that the so-called democracy of to-day, are the Jefferson, and their opponents, the anti-Jefferson parties, it will be equally interesting to note how completely the two have changed hands as to the principle upon which they were originally supposed to be divided.

The democracy of to-day hold the *liberty* of one man to be absolutely nothing, when in conflict with another man's right of *property*— Republicans, on the contrary, are for both the *man* and the *dollar*; but in cases of conflict, the man *before* the dollar—

I remember once being much amused at seeing two partially intoxicated men engaged in a fight with their great-coats on, which fight, after a long, and rather harmless contest, ended in each having fought himself *out* of his own coat, and *into* that of the other— If the two leading parties of this day are really identical with the two in the days of Jefferson and Adams, they have performed about the same feat as the two drunken men—

But soberly, it is now no child's play to save the principles of Jefferson from total overthrow in this nation.

One would start with great confidence that he could convince any sane child that the simpler propositions of Euclid are true; but, nevertheless, he would fail, utterly, with one who should deny the definitions and

axioms— The principles of Jefferson are the definitions and axioms of free society— And yet they are denied, and evaded, with no small show of success— One dashingly calls them “glittering generalities;” another bluntly calls them “self evident lies”; and still others insidiously argue that they apply only to “superior races”—

These expressions, differing in form, are identical in object and effect—the supplanting the principles of free government, and restoring those of classification, caste, and legitimacy— They would delight a convocation of crowned heads, plotting against the people— They are the van-guard—the miners, and sappers—of returning despotism— We must repulse them, or they will subjugate us—

This is a world of compensations; and he who would *be* no slave, must consent to *have* no slave— Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves; and, under a just God, can not long retain it.

All honor to Jefferson—to the man who, in the concrete pressure of a struggle for national independence by a single people, had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document, an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times, and so to embalm it there, that to-day, and in all coming days, it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling-block to the very harbingers of re-appearing tyranny and oppression—

Your obedient Servant

A. LINCOLN—

To Judge Fish - with every good wish
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